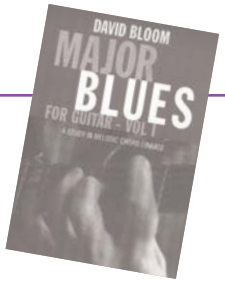
LESSONS

INTERMEDIATE



BLUES GURU DAVID BLOOM

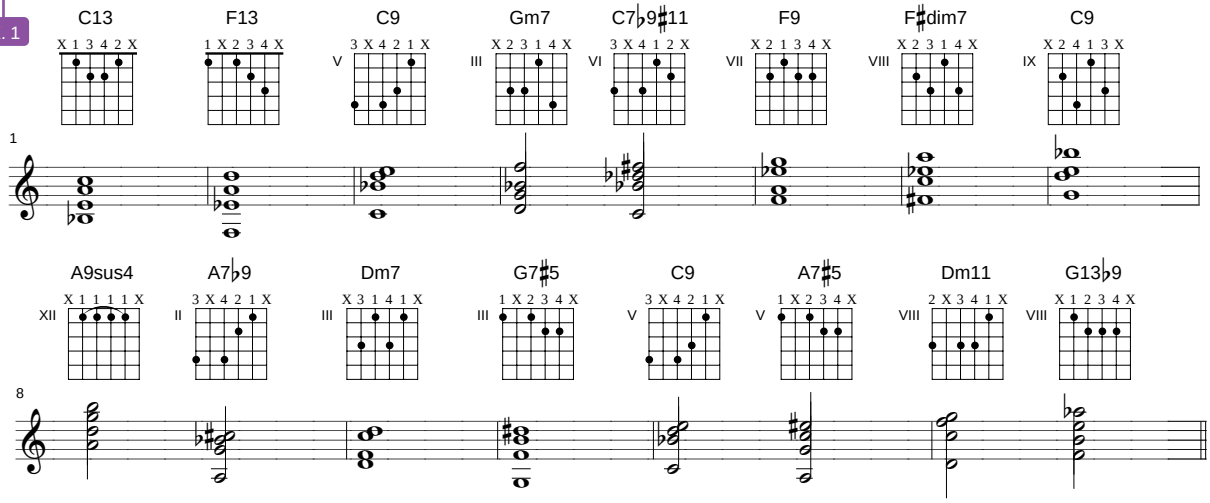
Blues for Right Now

When it comes to chords, I try to teach my students three things. First, I hip them to beautiful, sonorous voicings they may have been unaware of previously. Next and more importantly, I show them how to link chords melodically. Just as many a great jazz melody tends to move in scalar motion—that is, stepwise in intervals of seconds (not counting melodic leaps)—so too should the voices your chord progressions whenever possible, at least when it's smooth voice leading you're after.

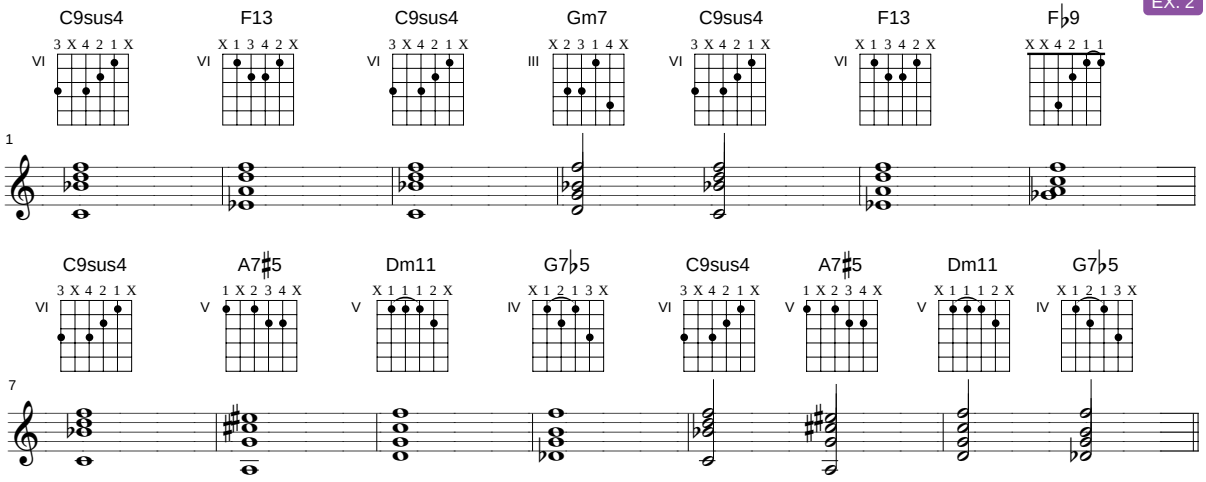
Check out the first two chords in Ex. 1, a 12-bar blues progression excerpted from my book Major Blues for Guitar Vol. I [bloomschoolofjazz.com]. Notice that as C13 shifts to F13, the highest three voices each move no more than a minor or major second in pitch. Smooth! In fact, the A on the third string is common to both chords, as it doesn't move at all. Common tones are beautiful things in harmony. Sure, they promote smooth voice leading between chords, but to me, they represent something bigger. To me, recontextualizing a note in a new chord magically brings the past and the present together in the same moment. Can you figure out which pitch is common to every chord in Ex. 2?

But this is all technical stuff compared the final thing I try to teach musicians, and that is to not just reiterate these moves as you might if you were playing down charts in a Las Vegas review. Instead, strive to become so comfortable with these shapes that you can mix, match, and connect them spontaneously. Then, through your music, people won't hear you "going through the motions," they'll hear the sound of you living your life right now. Listen to a John Coltrane solo, for instance, and often the best part is when an urgent search for a new melody, phrase, or musical direction ends in success. The greatest jazz represents not just the seeking, but also the finding of things in the moment. —As told to Jude Gold

EX. 1



EX. 2



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